

A WARNING MINISTRY?

March 26, 2012 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article)

A preacher recently posted an opinion piece to the IFB-Preacher's List entitled "What's Wrong with Warning Ministries."

I can't speak for others, but I don't have a warning ministry as such. I have a Bible preaching ministry that includes warnings. The fact that I issue a lot of warnings is only because we live at the end of the church age, in a time when apostasy is blowing with hurricane force winds, and there are a lot of things to warn about! Even so, the majority of my preaching/teaching ministry does *not* consist of warning.

The reality is that every Bible preacher has a warning ministry, unless he is a complete New Evangelical and has capitulated entirely to a "non-judgmental, positive-only" philosophy. In fact, even dyed-in-the-wool New Evangelicals such as Franklin Graham warn about some things. Harold Ockenga, the inventor of the term "neo-evangelicalism," warned about many things.

I don't know of any independent fundamental Baptist (IFB) preachers that don't have a warning ministry of some sorts, because every IFB preacher believes in 2 Timothy 4:2 ("Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine") and in Jude 3 ("earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints").

Any preacher that reproves and rebukes and lifts his voice against error has a warning ministry.

So the real question is this: WHAT SHOULD WE WARN ABOUT AND WHO AND WHEN?

Each preacher must answer these questions before God.

Can we warn only about "fundamental" error and only about certain men outside our "camp" and only about men outside our "persuasion" (such as the Pope or Rick Warren or Robert Schuller) and about an influential Baptist preacher only after we have discussed the matter privately with him?

This seems to be the position that has gained the ascendancy among IFB churches.

Based on my study of Scripture, I don't agree. My conclusions are as follows:

AS FOR WHAT TO WARN ABOUT, since I am admonished to stand for the whole counsel of God and to keep it "without spot" (Mat. 28:19-20; Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 6:13-14), I conclude that I have the right and responsibility to warn about things pertaining to the whole counsel of God as

opposed only to certain “essential” issues. Since I am instructed to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and I am not told in Scripture that some certain part of the faith only is “essential,” I conclude that I can warn about things pertaining to the entire New Testament Christian faith. Since Paul praised the church at Corinth for keeping all of the “ordinances” he had delivered to them--and in the context he discusses hair length, male-female differences, and the Lord’s Supper, none of which are considered “essential” doctrines--I conclude that I can warn about anything the Bible deals with. Since a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, I conclude that I can warn about little leaven as well as big leaven.

AS FOR WHO TO WARN ABOUT, I don’t see anywhere in Scripture that some men are out of bounds. God solemnly charges the preacher to identify those who teach contrary to apostolic doctrine, to exhort, reprove, and rebuke with all authority, to speak as the oracles of God, to earnestly contend for the faith, and even to warn about born-again compromisers (Romans 16:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:15; 1 Peter 4:11; Jude 3; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Nowhere in Scripture are these commandments restricted in their scope. Nowhere does God say that a Bible preacher can reprove and rebuke only the members of his own church or that he can reprove and rebuke anyone who errs *except* some particular influential Christian leader.

AS FOR WHEN AND HOW TO WARN, that depends on the situation.

Issues limited to a local church situation need to be dealt with by the local church.

Private offenses and private sins need to be dealt with privately, but public errors need to be dealt with publicly.

When a man builds an ecclesiastical empire, of sorts, and influences thousands of people beyond the borders of his congregation, his error is no longer a private matter and is no longer a matter pertaining only to his church.

As for Matthew 18:15-18, it has no bearing on this issue, as it instructs us as to how to deal with personal offenses between the members of the same church.

Biblical warnings are more needed today than ever in history.

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